

February 6, 1936

## **Heralding the Return, After an Undue Absence, of Charlie Chaplin in 'Modern Times.'**

By **FRANK S. NUGENT.**

The hands of the cinema clock were set back five years last night when a funny little man with a microscopic mustache, a battered derby hat, turned up shoes and a flexible bamboo cane returned to the Broadway screen to resume his place in the affections of the film-going public. The little man—it scarcely needs be said—is Charlie Chaplin, whose "Modern Times," opening at the Rivoli, restores him to a following that has waited patiently, burning incense in his temple of comedy, during the long years since his last picture was produced.

That was five years ago almost to the day. "City Lights" was its name and in it Mr. Chaplin refused to talk. He still refuses. But in "Modern Times" he has raised the ban against dialogue for other members of the cast, raised it, but not completely. A few sentences here and there, excused because they come by television, phonograph, the radio. And once—just once—Mr. Chaplin permits himself to be heard, singing some jabberwocky of his own to the tune of a Spanish fandango.

Those are the answers to the practical questions. They do not tell of Mr. Chaplin's picture, or of Chaplin himself, or of the comic feast that he has been preparing for almost two years in the guarded cloister in Hollywood known as the Chaplin studio.

But there is no cause for alarm and no reason to delay the verdict further: "Modern Times" has still the same old Charlie, the lovable little fellow whose hands and feet and prankish eyebrows can beat an irresistible tattoo upon an audience's funnybone or hold it still, taut beneath the spell of human tragedy. A flick of his cane, a quirk of a brow, an impish lift of his toe and the mood is off; a droop of his mouth, a sag of his shoulder, a quick blink of his eye and you are his again, a companion in suffering. Or do you have to be reminded that Chaplin is a master of pantomime? Time has not changed his genius.

Speak then, of the picture, and of its story. Rumor said that "Modern Times" was preoccupied with social themes, that Chaplin—being something of a liberal himself—had decided to dramatize the class struggle, that no less an authority than Shumiatsky, head of the Soviet film industry, had counseled him about the ending and that Chaplin, accepting that advice, had

made significant changes.

Mr. Chaplin's foreword to his picture was dangerously meaningful. "Modern Times," it reads, "is a story of industry, of individual enterprise—humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness." Verily, a strange prelude to an antic.

Happily for comedy, Mr. Chaplin's description is only part of the truth and we suspect he meant it to be that way. Hollywood has quoted him as saying, "There are those who always attach social significance to my work. It has none. I leave such subjects to the lecture platform. To entertain is my first consideration."

We should prefer to describe "Modern Times" as the story of the little clown, temporarily caught up in the cogs of an industry geared to mass production, spun through a three-ring circus and out into a world as remote from industrial and class problems as a comedy can make it.

It finds Charlie as a worker on an assembly line in a huge factory. A sneeze or a momentary raise of his head is all that is needed to disrupt the steady processional of tiny gadgets whose nuts he must tighten with one swooping twist. At lunch hour his boss places him in an experimental automatic feeding machine. Like Charlie, the device goes berserk. Bowls of soup are tossed in his face, a corn-on-the-cob self-feeder throws moderation to the winds and kernels to the floor. The machine alternately grinds corn into his face and wipes his mouth with a solicitous, but entirely ineffectual, self-wiper. Charlie recovers in a hospital. When he returns, discharged as cured, he runs into the unemployment problem.

So much for the industrial crisis. Finished with it for the time, the picture involves its hero in a radical demonstration, a prison riot, several police patrol wagons, a gamin (Paulette Goddard, his new leading lady), who is homeless and helpless as he; a job as night watchman in a department store, more trouble with the law, a new job as a singing waiter in a restaurant and still more trouble with the law. There is, for good measure, a return to the factory, but no longer as a piece of human machinery on the assembly line.

Sociological concept? Maybe. But a rousing, rib-tickling, gag-be-strewn jest for all that and in the best Chaplin manner. If you remember his two-reeler, "The Skating Rink," you will be pleased to hear that Mr. Chaplin has not forgotten it either, and has found a place somewhere in his story for a more modern companion piece. You have seen him as a waiter years before, and you should be delighted to learn that he has not forgotten his tray-juggling technique. You should know, of old, his facility for dodging the Keystone cops and he clatters away just as nimbly now even though his pursuers wear more modern uniforms.

So it goes, and mighty pleasantly, too, with Charlie keeping faith with his old public by bringing back the tricks he used so well when the cinema was very young, and by extending his following among the moderns by employing devices new to the clown dynasty. If you need more encouragement than this, be informed then that Miss Goddard is a winsome waif and a fitting recipient of the great Chariot's championship, and that there are in the cast several players who have adorned the Chaplin films since first the little fellow kicked up his heels and scampered into our hearts. This morning there is good news: Chaplin is back again.

Also at the Rivoli, and deserving of mention even on a bill that presents Mr. Chaplin, is Walt Disney's latest cartoon, "Mickey's Polo Team." Certainly the rowdiest of all the Disneys, it contains a wild and woolly polo match between a team comprised of Mickey, Donald Duck, the Goof and the Big Bad Wolf and another four representing Harpo Marx, Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy and Mr. Chaplin. Jack Holt is referee.

**MODERN TIMES**, written, directed and produced by Charles Chaplin; musical score by Mr. Chaplin; settings by Charles D Hall; released through United Artists. At the Rivoli.

A Tramp . . . . . Charles Chaplin

A Gamin . . . . . Paulette Goddard

A Cafe Proprietor . . . . . Henry Bergman

A Mechanic . . . . . Chester Conklin

The Burglars . . . . . Stanley Sandford

Hank Mann

Louis Natheux

President of a Steel Corporation . . . . . Allen Garcia

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